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SUBJECT: BECKSTEIN LEADS BAVARIA'S GET-TOUGH APPROACH TO ISLAMIC
EXTREMISM

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REFS: (A) MUNICH 28, (B) MUNICH 196

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Guenther Beckstein, Germany's longest-serving state Interior Minister and presumptive future Bavarian Minister President (REF A), has for years identified Islamic terrorism as the greatest risk to domestic security in Germany. According to Beckstein, about 50 people living in Bavaria have direct links to Islamic terrorist networks while another 500 Islamic extremists support violence as a means to achieve their political goals. More than any other German state, Bavaria has developed innovative strategies and instruments to cope with this challenge, particularly through the programs known as AKIS and BIRGiT. While Beckstein's success at fighting crime, including Islamic extremism, is noteworthy, this success comes with the perception that Bavaria is unfriendly toward Muslims in general. Additionally, there remains the danger that Bavarian officials may have become over-confident about their ability to prevent a potential terrorist attack. End summary.

ISLAMIC EXTREMISM IN BAVARIA

¶2. (U) According to the latest Bavarian Office for the Protection of the Constitution (OPC) report published on March 28, about 9,000 "extremist" foreigners are currently living in Bavaria. Ninety percent of them are Turks (including Kurdish Turks). Approximately half are believed to be involved with Islamic fundamentalism (Note: There are believed to be approximately 317,000 Muslims in Bavaria, out of a total population of about 12.5 million.). According to Beckstein, there are only about 50 people in Bavaria directly affiliated with terrorist networks, mainly individuals independent from fixed organizational structures. However, Beckstein said, another 500 persons are willing to resort to violence to achieve their political goals. The threat from the extremists is primarily targeted at their home countries, rather than Germany, he added, when he presented the latest OPC report to the media.

¶3. (U) Some have questioned Beckstein's use of the word "extremist," which they say he applies too liberally. Such liberal use of the term would be true-to-form for Beckstein, who as an adherent of the proactive "Broken Window Theory" of law enforcement, seeks to shine a spotlight on all and any criminal activity in Bavaria. When it comes to deterring and solving crime, Beckstein can rightly claim success. Notably, he announced earlier this year that his police had not only solved every murder in the state, but had actually achieved a case-closing rate in excess of 100 percent in 2006 (the statistic actually includes a case from a prior year which had not been solved until 2006, distorting the number).

Regardless of occasional statistical distortions, Bavaria has, in fact, achieved a remarkably low crime rate - the lowest in Germany, and one of the lowest in Europe.

¶4. (U) Bavarian prosecutors are also known for their pro-active measures. They were the first in Germany to achieve a conviction (in the case of Ansar al-Islam member Lokman Amin Mohammed) under the new (2002) section "129B" of the Germany penal code, which gives authorities the ability to prosecute individuals for membership in a foreign terrorist organization. Another trial of two Iraqis, also pursuant to section 129B, is currently underway in Munich. In a January 2007 decision, the Bavarian Administrative Court upheld the Bavarian government's September 2006 closing of the so-called "Multi-Cultural House" in Ulm on the grounds that it was serving as a haven for Muslim extremists. In one instance, the Bavarian government has even taken action to head off the spreading of extremist ideas via film. When the Turkish film "Tal der Woelfe" (Valley of the Wolves), with its graphically negative portrayal of the U.S. military, was scheduled to be shown in several theaters, the Bavarian government requested that the theaters voluntarily curtail the film's engagement (most did), out of concern that it could stoke violence and anti-western feelings among certain audiences.

AKIS

¶5. (U) For Bavarian law enforcement authorities, September 11, 2001 served as a wake-up call. Following the attacks, the Bavarian Criminal Office (LKA) created a "Strategic Innovation Center" -- a think tank of academics and police to examine the problem of Islamic fundamentalism. In June 2002, the LKA set up a new division named "Investigation of Criminal Extremist Islamic Structures," know by

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its German acronym "AKIS." AKIS units were set up in all police headquarters in Bavaria, coordinating cooperation of police, prosecutors, the OPC, tax authorities and other agencies. AKIS' mission is the early identification of Islamic extremists, particularly "sleepers," and terrorist planning using a variety of tools ranging from direct surveillance to electronic eavesdropping and financial investigations. A key element of AKIS is information-sharing with other state and federal agencies, including the German Intelligence Service (BND).

BIRGIT

¶6. (SBU) Following the success of AKIS, the Bavarian Interior Ministry set up a new program in November 2004. The program has the unwieldy name of "Accelerated Identification and Expulsion of People Considered Dangerous in Conjunction with Islamic Terrorism and Extremism," and is known by its less-unwieldy German acronym "BIRGiT." BIRGiT is a task force of specialists from police, immigration authorities, the OPC, and other agencies. While AKIS gathers information, BIRGiT's mission is to act on the information. Simply put, BIRGiT aims to take Islamic extremists off the streets of Bavaria through prosecution or deportation (either voluntary or forced).

¶7. (SBU) BIRGiT can be very aggressive with respect to those alleged extremists that fall under its gaze. Those identified as extremists can expect to find authorities overtly following their every move and listening-in on every conversation. One of the implied objectives of the program is to make Islamic extremists feel so unwelcome in Bavaria, that they will leave the state willingly (although perhaps not leave Germany). Presenting the latest OPC report for 2006, Beckstein said that with the help of BIRGiT, his ministry was able to obtain 65 expulsion orders against potential terrorists last year. In 40 cases, people were deported and permanently denied reentry into Germany.

MUSLIM POLICE OFFICERS

¶18. (U) Beckstein has recognized that native-Bavarian police officers would not be able to successfully penetrate Islamic extremist groups. He was one of the first in Germany to understand that incorporating foreign-born police officers into the force could be an asset both in penetrating extremist groups and in helping build confidence and understanding between foreigners and the police. Beckstein explained that, when he opened the police to non-citizens in 1993, he did so in order to help foreigners identify with German society. Since 1993, about 100 foreigners of various nationalities have been employed by the Bavarian state police, about half of them Turks. They are admitted upon successful completion of the normal test required of all police recruits. Additionally, they must possess a valid residence permit - German citizenship is not required -- and be fluent in both German and their native language.

COMMENT

¶19. (SBU) Given the thorough scrutiny that Bavarian authorities give any individual or group that could be perceived as "extremist," officials here are confident that a "Hamburg Cell" could not operate unfettered in Bavaria today. When it comes to preventing and fighting crime (perhaps with the exception of white-collar crime - see Ref B on the Siemens corruption scandal), Bavarian authorities are in the forefront. Still, it is possible that the past successes and supreme self-confidence of the Bavarian law enforcement community have bred a bit of complacency. There is a real sense that "it can't happen here" in Bavaria - not unlike what many Americans felt prior to September 11, 2001.

¶10. (SBU) We also note that the line between ensuring a secure society and protecting civil-liberties can be a thin one. While Bavaria's secure streets are a significant factor in the quality of life of its citizens, the scrutiny of non-western outsiders and their ideas can make many uncomfortable. Bavaria's Interior Minister Beckstein has clearly tilted the scales toward security (and thus-far managed not to run afoul of the German or Bavarian constitutions in the process) -- and there is no reason to expect he will alter course when he moves into the State Chancellery this fall.

¶11. (U) This report has been coordinated with Embassy Berlin.

¶12. (U) Previous reporting from Munich is available on our SIPRNET website at www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/munich/ .

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